DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 374 451 CS 214 527

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TITLE Negotiations in Community Literacy: Conflict in Community Collaboration. The Writing of Arguments across Diverse Contexts. Study 3. Final Report.
INSTITUTION National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy, Berkeley, CA.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Sep 94
CONTRACT R117G10036
NOTE 31p.; For Study 2, see CS 214 526.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Research; *Conflict; Conflict Resolution; *Cooperation; Discourse Analysis; Higher Education; *Interpersonal Communication; Landlords; Persuasive Discourse; Writing Research
IDENTIFIERS Carnegie Mellon University PA; *Communication Context; *Community Literacy; Literacy as a Social Process; Rhetorical Strategies; Tenants

ABSTRACT

Part of an account of a community experiment in Pittsburgh trying to address the contested issue of landlords and tenants through explicitly rhetorical strategies for planning and deliberation, a study focused on conflict and how community collaboration handled difference. Four subjects, landlords and/or tenants who represented a range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, met for four sessions to explore the causes of landlord/tenant conflicts while representing either a landlord or tenant perspective (as opposed to articulating only their personal beliefs). Subjects were asked to use their analyses and discussions to write a "memorandum of understanding" that could be used as a tool for action. Each session was recorded on audiotape and videotape, and subjects recorded "self-interviews" and participate in a final interview. Results indicated that, knowingly or unknowingly, members of the group used a variety of strategies to transform how their ideas were received by other members of the group. These rhetorical strategies were successful in ensuring that voices were heard. For this group, reaching consensus meant reaching a point where conflicts are hidden to create a solid foundation for moving to action. Findings suggest that the process observed was not a consensus building process, but a constructive one which gave rise to active strategies for negotiating the conflicts the process raised. (Contains 13 references, 7 notes, and one figure of data.) (RS)

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ED 374 451

FINAL REPORT

THE WRITING OF ARGUMENTS ACROSS DIVERSE CONTEXTS

Study 3
Negotiations in Community Literacy: Conflict in Community Collaboration

Linda Flower and Julia Deems

Carnegie Mellon University

September, 1994

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CS214527

NOTE: The research reported herein was supported under the Educational Research and Development Center Program (Grant No. R117G10036 for the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy) as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The findings and opinions expressed in this report do not reflect the position or policies of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement or the U.S. Department of Education.

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FINAL REPORT

CONFLICT IN COMMUNITY COLLABORATION[1]

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September, 1994

Community groups are intensely rhetorical forums. However, when the topic is the troubled relations between low income landlords (trying to maintain old buildings on limited resources) and tenants (trying to live on uncertain incomes) in inner city communities, these grassroots dialogues are not a place to look for easy consensus. Shaped by poverty, racial tension, a crumbling urban infrastructure, and local social history, the landlord tenant problem admits no easy answers. It is a prime example of an issue that can not be resolved by a technical art or science--what Aristotle called the "things about which we commonly deliberate." Although such discussions seem quite distant from the tradition of deliberative rhetoric prized in academic forums, the problems they pose stand as open questions. They call for the reasoned deliberation Aristotle describes in which rhetoric is not reduced to the mere persuasion of others present, but functions to discover "the available means of persuasion in a given case," to mount the arguments that best justify decision. As Plato predicted, debates often turn on those disputed ideas and terms (on which "the multitude is bound to fluctuate") that would seem to call for systematic analysis, the dialectic of division and collection Plato urged for getting at the heart of the matter. Even more clearly, the conflict between hard-to-call competing claims (such as equity versus community) calls for a balanced, even dispassionate consideration of alternatives, where debate can take the place of force (Perelman).

In practice, however, this deliberative process is often short circuited. In the face of problems they can not solve, community groups invoke a discourse of complaint and blame and come to depend on an oppositional rhetoric which invites an advocacy stance from members.

Here is how one long time community developer describes it:

> And I [have] attended a number of those meetings and there was just a group of landlords just trading horror stories. . . . 'Cause one of the big problems with the tenant, or the landlord meetings is they have come in, for two hours they talk and nothing, nothing ends up at the other

[1] We want to thank Lorraine Higgins who not only played a major role in the conduct of this study, but in our thinking and interpretation through her own work and our collaborations with her.

> side. . . . [They leave thinking] I feel better tonight and I go back for a week and then I come back next week and I talk again and still have the same feelings and [I'll] still be in the same place, but I'll feel better 'cause it's off my chest [And essentially you're talking to your own] fears. They've got the same problem, not the people to help you solve your problem. . . . There's no text, there's no decision, and if there is a decision, the decision is that they all agree that they still feel the same way. (Kirk, Final Interview, pp. 8-9)

Another community organizer bemoans the evanescent nature of the conversational understandings that do develop.

> In our groups . . . we will argue about a topic for discussion, a situation, one month, and they'll come to some kind of a consensus or agreement and then a month later, they'll all forget, nothing will happen, and they'll argue about it again (Dave, Final Interview, p.12).

And another suggests why commitment alone is not enough :

> I'm a very active participant in my community . . . . Everybody wants to go there and be there one hour and get it, everything accomplished. But the funny thing is that we never get beyond the issue that you wanna talk about because (laughs)-- because people ... people oftentimes come with their own agendas. . . (Lynn, Final Interview, p. 34).

Even as a rhetoric of inquiry seems called for, the language of Aristotle, Plato, and Perelman has an air of book learning in this context. And the conventions of scientific, technical, or bureaucratic discourse (that could indeed structure this discussion more efficiently) do not offer an acceptable alternative. One reason is that unlike the discourse of a homogeneous group--voting Athenians, a New England town meeting, a legal or academic forum--the dialogue of the inner city must operate in the context of cultural, economic, racial, and educational difference. It must recognize not only competing interests but the alternative discourses people bring to these discussions, from legal assertion, to personal narrative, to the rhetoric of social justice. In authorizing difference, many grassroots groups cultivate a multi-voiced discourse which refuses to privilege the discourses of the technocrat, bureaucrat, or academic. Living on margins they identify themselves with voicing rather than suppressing conflict and with an adversarial stance toward institutions of power. Unfortunately, this stance also tends to support an oppositional discourse of complaint and blame that is better adapted to voicing conflict than exploring ways to resolve it.

Urban communities face a growing need for an alternative rhetoric that is generative and openly deliberative rather than adversarial. As the budgets of urban centers shrink and the sense of shared civic responsibility for cities decreases, much of the decision making that used to be centralized in city and county agencies is being transferred to neighborhoods. Although these changes give people more control over their own lives, along with that power comes the burden of action and the cost of failure. At the same time, this alternative rhetoric must speak the language of grassroots groups; it must be a rhetoric that can articulate difference, put conflict squarely on the table, and let multiple voices, that do not share a common discourse, have a place in defining and resolving problems. Inner cities need a discourse of both deliberation and diversity.

This paper is in part an account of a community experiment trying to address the contested issue of landlords and tenants through explicitly rhetorical strategies for planning and deliberation, organized around the (quite unusual in this setting) practice of collaborative *writing*. Initiated by an urban settlement house and its Community Literacy Center (the CLC), this five session collaboration between a small group of landlords and tenants was designed to begin in conversation and end in a useful text. For the CLC this project was also a maiden voyage into housing issues, designed to explore how its literacy-based alternatives to the discourse of advocacy and opposition would fare in such a forum. Like the Center's other projects, discussion was structured by the practice of collaborative planning, which meant that each member of the group was committed, on the one hand, to articulating conflict--vigorously representing a competing perspective on inner city landlords or tenants--and on the other, to supporting and developing each other's position in planning and writing a useful document.

For us as researchers, the focus of inquiry was on conflict and on how this community collaboration, designed to bring troubled issues up for deliberation, handled difference. The CLC project offered a chance to track a process dedicated to the intentional articulation of conflict and to ask: How is such conflict negotiated when writing enters the picture and collaboration is structured around rhetorical planning? After a brief look at the social context, methods, and people involved, we will argue that the process we observed was not a consensus building process, but a constructive one which gave rise to the active strategies for negotiating the conflicts the process raised.

THE CONTEXT FOR CONFLICT

Bringing More Voices to the Table

The Community Literacy Center (CLC) is a collaboration between Community House, a 75-year-old landmark of Pittsburgh's Northside, and the Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy at Carnegie Mellon. It is

helping to reinvent an older tradition of community/university collaborations begun in turn-of-the-century settlement houses like this one and Hull House of Chicago, where the problems of urban neighborhoods drew university faculty into a combination of inquiry and grassroots activism. As a grassroots lab for social change, the CLC argues that change can come through education, collaboration, and writing that lets people make their voices heard. It builds its educational vision on the theoretical base of cognitive rhetoric, focused on the problem-solving strategies people bring to problem analysis, collaboration, and argument. For five years, the CLC's projects had helped inner city teens produce documents and public community conversations on issues such as risk, violence, and school reform, working one-on-one with a mentor from Carnegie Mellon (Long). The relationship between mentors and teens was structured around the rhetorical practice of collaborative planning, in which the teenage writer holds the role of Planner and the college student takes the role of Supporter. In planning and writing sessions the Supporter helps the writer to develop and articulate his or her own ideas, by offering not only social support and acting as a sounding board but by prompting the Planner to think rhetorically in terms of a key point and purpose, the needs and possible response of readers, and the range of text conventions that might support purposes or work for given readers.[2]

The landlord and tenant project was the beginning of a series of new projects called Argue working with adult community-planning groups, focused on building document-based plans and arguments for action. Although they were structured around collaborative planning, the one-on-one practice that had been used in school settings needed to be transformed into a group practice that supported not only collaborative planning but a collaborative text. In this project the CLC literacy leader, Lorraine Higgins, became both the Supporter, prompting the group to consider key points, purposes, audience, and text, and the facilitator. That is, after a short training session on strategies for planning and supporting, she recorded developing and conflicting plans on a chalk board as people talked and reminded members of the group to take over the task of supporting and prompting one another. Higgins' own research on the construction of argument had explored contrasts between the rhetoric of inquiry valued in the university and the rhetoric of opposition and advocacy valued in urban communities. The goal of Argue was to bridge these discourses--to build community-based plans for concrete action, but at the same time to construct these plans in an

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[2]For a more theoretical discussion of community literacy and the aims of the CLC see Peck, Flower, Higgins (in press); Long (1994) and Long and Flower (in prep.) document the work with teens and the mentors own attempts to interpret this intercultural collaboration. Flower, Wallace, Norris, and Burnett (1994) offers background on collaborative planning in educational contexts.

atmosphere of inquiry that could lead to new solutions by bringing some typically marginalized voices to that table not just as advocates but as collaborators in a solution.[3]

The CLC obviously played an important role in shaping the collaboration we studied since it is the CLC facilitator who structures discussions as collaborative planning sessions and moves the group toward the production of text. However, the overriding goal of this CLC project was to bring more voices to the table, to structure discussions in which opposing positions were not only solicited but supported. This process also created a context for conflict, opening the door to more direct negotiation. Although the *interpersonal* conflicts that fire up the oppositional discourse Kirk described may be discouraged in collaborative planning, *substantive* conflict around opposing perspectives is encouraged. And once these positions are on the table, the need to write forces the group in some way to deal with them. So although this is not a study of a "typical" community discussion of the sort Kirk describes, it revealed some ways of building an argument in the face of diversity that differ from the patterns of normal academic argument. And it suggests that both writing and educational strategies such as collaborative planning can play a positive role in community settings.

Portraits of Participants

Because we wanted to bring the conflicts from the community to the table, each person asked to participate in this study had had experience as either a landlord or a tenant (frequently as both), had been involved in the community debate on this issue in the past, and often had engaged professionally in some area related to landlord/tenant interactions. Additionally, they represented a range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. This group was comprised of:[4]

Dave. As the full-time, paid president of a local community group and a community organizer, Dave Rice worries about the effect individuals have on the community as a whole. And while he recognizes the value of community groups, he believes that often the leader of the group has too much control over the decisions that are made--frequently because members get "volunteered" to research issues or set meetings and then are not willing to do the work required.

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[3]An analysis of how the educationally-based practice of collaborative planning was adapted to this community context can be found in Higgins, Flower, and Deems (in prep.). This attempt to bridge discourses build on Higgins' (1992) theoretical discussion of argument construction which guided her study of how women, returning to an urban community college, negotiated conflicting styles of academic and community of argument.

[4] The names of the community resident who participated in this project have been replaced with pseudonyms throughout this paper.

Kirk. Kirk Murphy is a member of a small, grassroots community development organization that replaces vacant lots and boarded building with affordable housing in an inner-city neighborhood. Part of his work involves motivating landlords and tenants to maintain buildings, keeping key corridors alive and attractive to small businesses and potential home buyers. One of the problems between landlords and tenants, he argues, is getting individuals to take responsibility for their actions.

Liz. Liz Marino, a mother of four in her early 30s, is very active in her community council and on school committees and is known in her diverse Pittsburgh community for being an energetic and fair mediator in landlord/tenant disputes. Marino has an unflinching commitment to making her mixed urban neighborhood "work" but admits that community meetings can be discouraging at times, especially when people come in with their own agendas.

LuWanda. LuWanda Baker is a single, African-American mother employed in a pharmacy. LuWanda, a tenant who had moved "ten times in ten years," brought with her a range of experiences, from dealing with an absentee landlord to participating in a subsidized rent-to-purchase program.

Because these four knew at least one other member of the group and had occasionally worked on community groups together in the past, they shared some understanding of the history of their community. At the same time, they also had their own values and beliefs, and these affected their attitudes and actions as they participated in this discussion.

Tracking a Community Collaboration

The Argue project was designed to meet for four sessions during which the four participants would articulate and explore the causes of landlord/tenant conflicts while representing either a landlord or tenant perspective (as opposed to articulating only their personal beliefs). They would use their analyses and discussions to write a Memorandum of Understanding that would not only fairly and accurately reflect the conflicts but would advance community thinking on these issues. In the spirit of community activism, this document was not to be an end in itself, a mere exercise, but a useful tool for action that the group would decide to take. (In the end the group elected to meet an additional time to complete the document and two of its members helped produce a subsequent booklet and community conversation that involved housing groups around the city.)

In session one the group received an overview of the collaborative planning method, then with prompts from the facilitator opened their discussion of the major issues and conflicts that landlords and tenants face.

In session two, the group was prompted to explore conflicts further, to develop a purpose and audience for their memorandum, and to consider text conventions they might use--and to take responsibility for writing small portions of the text between meetings. As this planning continued into session three, the group was encouraged to support individual writers as they overviewed their plans and ideas for their section of the memorandum at the table. In the last two sessions, the group jointly read drafts and gave revision suggestions, with prompting to support each other as writers and to consider different perspectives on the issues.

Each session was recorded both on audiotape and videotape (with a stationary video camera). In between selected sessions, each writer taped a self-interview, responding to questions about the goals/expectations/ideas they had going into the session and how they saw their goals faring. A final interview, conducted by Flower, moved from open-ended requests for participants' evaluation of the process to direct questions on how they saw conflicts being addressed and negotiated in the sessions.

People brought various motivations to their participation in the sessions. The four community members who came to this project were motivated to find new ways to get something done on an issue they cared deeply about, as we will see in their profiles. Flower sat in on the sessions not as a researcher but as President of the CLC's Board who with the group was asking whether the CLC's writing-based, educational agenda and collaborative strategies could work in this adult, community development context.[5] In the spirit of helping explore this question, the participants agreed to tape self-interviews and reflections between sessions in order to evaluate how this CLC project was working for them and the community. Therefore the research questions we pose here about conflict and collaboration were on the table as public questions shared with the participants. The process of collaborative planning itself asks writers to reflect on their own process and to develop the metaknowledge that leads to strategic choice; therefore, the reflection and evaluation that contributed to our inquiry were a normal part of the process under study.

To build a more in-depth picture of how significant conflicts can be negotiated over time, we tracked the fate of two sustained areas of disagreement over the course of this project. One was an early point of contention over the "disputed term" of *process* which is central to the group's solution. The second conflict, a central disagreement over how to define the

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[5] Julia Deems joined the project as a NCSWL Research Assistant as the analysis of data began, co-authoring the interpretation presented here. We wish to thank Elenore Long who managed the collection and organization of the data.

problem of landlords and tenants itself, remains unresolved at the end of the project, even though the group agrees on a final text.

Our analysis of these conflicts is based on transcripts of all five sessions, the self-interviews, and the final interviews, as well as the texts and drafts. This allowed us to conduct a strategic analysis of these conflicts. In order to understand the internal and interpersonal negotiations that let people construct meaning, we argue that it is not enough to analyze moves, actions, or strategies alone without understanding why people are taking that action, without insight into their strategic knowledge: that is, their goals and awareness as well as observable strategies. Our strategic analysis then attempted to identify (or make reasonable inferences about) the reasons or goals behind the moves people made, to document the strategies/moves they used, and to seek evidence about the degrees of awareness and sense of options they brought to this process. A strategic analysis raises, of course, problems of evidence since goals and awareness are typically much harder to document. On the other hand, we would argue that the knowledge that matters most in such collaborations is the more complex strategic knowledge that guides internal and interpersonal negotiation.

THE NEGOTIATION OF COLLABORATIVE MEANING

Consensus and Construction

The CLC creates a forum for collaboration that puts substantive conflicts over open questions up on the table. It also poses an interesting theoretical question about the goal of such collaboration that we wish to broach at the outset. Should we envision this as a process of building agreement around shared meanings, or of building meaning itself? Some accounts of collaboration--and its virtues--focus on the social process by which people arrive at consensus, the way in which belief takes the status of knowledge by becoming socially justified in a community of peers (Bruffee, 1984). In this picture of social consensus building, conflict is a generative force that introduces new beliefs or ideas, around which a new consensus can form, through the power of argument or perhaps just the power of power. Likewise the role of rhetoric is "to aim chiefly at reinforcing communal values, 'strengthening adherence to what is already accepted'" (Miller, 1993, p. 85). And that, of course, is also the problem with consensus, that leads some critics like Trimbur to argue the place for dissensus: if your position wins the contest for social acceptability, my more marginal voice, less conventionally justifiable position may lose in its bid to become "knowledge." The tradition of rhetoric, from Plato's dialectic interrogation of competing truth claims, to the zero/sum game of high school debate, seems to support this competitive view of knowledge construction and democratic consensus (may the best idea win). Moreover, the knowledge in question tends to exist as a set of propositions, positions, or beliefs. But what if the goal of collaboration is to

bring marginalized voices (without fully articulated positions) to the table or to support the discourse of those who traditionally lose the contest for public justification? Consensus-building around the most "justifiable" position may not be the most desirable goal for collaboration. In arguing for dissensus, Trimbur sees collaboration as "not merely a process of consensus-making but more important as a process of identifying difference and locating these differences in relation to each other" (p. 610). The goal is not "an agreement that reconciles differences through an ideal conversation but rather . . . the desire of humans to live and work together with differences" (p. 615).

The importance of such consensus (defined as a shared, collective sense of a group's experience) has also come under question in organizational theory. Do groups have to achieve consensus in order to take action? "One theory is that organized action is the product of consensus among organizational participants, a view that has led to the conceptualization of organizations as systems of shared meanings. . . . A second view . . . argues the only minimal shared understanding is required, because organization is based primarily on exchange (e.g. of work for pay)" (Donnellon, Gray, & Bougon, 1986, p.1).

Donnellon et al. argue, however, that organized action can occur in the absence of shared meaning when there is a repertoire of communication forms that "allow members to coordinate their actions" (p. 1). Their discourse analysis of a organizational conflict shows how group members who held competing interpretations of an event used discussion to arrive at multiple routes to the same end or action, without ever reaching a consensus or a shared understanding of their joint experience. Collaborative action, this work suggests, does not have to depend on shared belief, identification, or consensual meanings, if people can communicate their way to a common organized action.

In our study, achieving social consensus--defined as a shared representation that could claim the socially justified status of knowledge--played only a limited role in the way this group moved to text or to action. Instead of trying to win social justification among competing positions, instead of trying to build consensus around a selected proposition, this collaboration was a construction process in which people responded to conflict by constructing new meanings and a plan of action. Conflict, we will emphasize, did not evaporate in the light of happy consensus; people came and left with strong competing representations of reality and response. What they constructed was not a shared definition of the problem, but a literate action--a text. More importantly, we will argue, the rhetorical process of structured collaboration and its drive to text (like Donnellon's communication strategies), let this group articulate and maintain independent perspectives and still build a representation on which they could act.

Does this distinction between consensus (around a preexisting proposition) and construction (of new meaning) matter? At some level of analysis, of course, any form of agreement is a social consensus. What does it matter if knowledge is being made, not just promoted? And what if individuals actually hold strikingly divergent personal representations from one another or from those representations that claim the status of public knowledge, if dissenters fall quiet and fall in line for the vote? We will argue that unless we account for individual meaning making within a collaborative process--for the resistant, unreconstructed, unassimilated representations of individual writers--we are likely to create a reified notion of knowledge that no one really holds. This blind spot to personal representations and non-consensual knowledges presents an obvious problem if one is teaching individual students. But a purely social view of public knowledge also sets us up to misunderstand the dynamics of collaboration in communities where flashes of apparent consensus turn out to be flashes in the pan and positions with the apparent public status of "knowledge" regularly fail to elicit supportive action. A generalized account of social construction will tell us which ideas get repeated over time; a more closely observed account of writers' social cognitive processes can tell us how writers privately and jointly construct meaning. Secondly, a social cognitive account of how writers use collaboration to construct new, negotiated meanings throws light on the way people deal with conflict . Carolyn Miller (1993) has called this the challenge of the new rhetorics: to develop a "rhetoric of pluralism [that] must speak not only to the diversity within any given community but also to the diversity of communities that coexist and overlap each other" (p. 91). Looking at collaboration as a constructive process reveals the (to some, surprising) role writing and rhetorically-based strategies for collaboration can play in community deliberation.

Negotiating Conflict in the Construction of Meaning

Meaning making, whether in the mind of an individual writer or in collaboration, is often a constructive response to conflict. If the model of collaboration as consensus building places people in the midst of competing propositions and beliefs vying for adherence, a model of negotiation places writers within the midst of multiple social, cultural, and linguistic forces, including personal goals, literate conventions, and the expectations of an audience or the pressures of a collaborator This array of outer forces (or rather those forces that gain a writer's selective attention) give rise to a set of inner voices that enter the writer's thoughts and would shape meaning in their own image. Such voices not only offer language and concepts, they urge priorities, whisper caution, demand the limelight, or propose structure. And, critical to our case, these voices also come in conflict with one another as they introduce competing attitudes, values, and bodies of knowledge, as well as the

alternative strategies for persuasion and multiple social expectations this rhetorical situation calls into play.

In the collaboration we study, some of the forces whose meaning-shaping voices are most visibly in negotiation involve:

- the social context of this event, from the neighborhood's long history of interracial relations and activism, to the more immediate social goals of the CLC, to the practice of collaborative planning which structured social interactions, and the (unusual) expectation that each member of this community group would produce text

- the personal representations of the landlord/tenant problem that each member brought to the table (and was expected to speak for)

- the shifting personal and power relations among the people at the table

- the various conventional discourses (from legal advice to personal narrative) that introduce alternative sets of conventions and expectations into the discussion. In addition to this heteroglossia of conventions, the immediate discourse created its own set of repeated claims, metaphors, and words that imported other histories to the discussion (regardless at times of the speaker's intended meaning)

- finally, the strategic knowledge of individual members came into play, that is, their personal goals, the strategies they brought to collaboration, and the awareness they had of their own moves and options.

Negotiation in this constructive process is not like a union arbitration, giving up *x* amount of income for *y* amount of security. Negotiated meaning making occurs when writers rise to awareness of competing voices and build meaning in response to that conflict. Even if that awareness is momentary, it can produce a new understanding that acknowledges competing goals and constraints. At times writers negotiate conflict in the sense of *arbitrating* among power relations, choosing what voices to hear, what to deny. At other times negotiation is a form of embracing multiple conflicting goods in the sense of *navigating* a best course, shaping a meaning to honor as many values/voices as possible.

Insofar as a practice like collaborative planning can influence the way writers deal with conflict, the process we want to foster is one in which writers construct a negotiated meaning, rising to greater reflective awareness of the multiple voices and sometimes conflicting forces their meaning needs to entertain. The understandings writers come to in text are a provisional

resolution constructed in the middle of both an internal and a face-to-face conversation. Such negotiation is not "giving in" or settling for less, but reaching for a more complex version of a best solution.

Our account of how this community group negotiated conflict starts with what may be a common but little recognized feature of such collaborations--the creation of an apparent consensus. As this chimera of agreement falls apart (when the individual representations of a conversationally "shared" idea emerge), we will observe two ways groups deal with genuine conflict--by finding consensus in action and by a more subtle, strategic process of transforming the group text.

The Problem of Misleading Consensus

In community groups, members come to a discussion, voice their views, negotiate with others, and walk away feeling that they have come to some agreement or resolution. Yet this consensus may be tenuous at best and frequently will not last. Not surprisingly, when that apparent consensus breaks down, group members may feel frustrated and even betrayed. This common scenario raises two questions: Why is this consensus so often fleeting? And why do people assume it is so necessary to achieve?

The collaboration we studied was no exception. And as we observed repeated occurrences of apparent consensus unraveling, we began to see how the goal of consensus could itself be misleading. Community activists often describe their work as trying to galvanize a community into agreement on an issue. But this attitude, which motivates grassroots political activity, suggests that the public ought to have a shared vision, and that by drawing individuals into a shared vision, the groundswell will lead to action. In spite of this attraction to working on a shared mission and the belief that it is a precursor to success, the desire for sustained consensus and belief that it can exist may set up unrealistic expectations. The expectation that a diverse inner city group ought to achieve consensus on goals, for instance, is often unrealistic, yet when it is not met, the ideal of consensus would force us to conclude that the group has failed. But perhaps it is that expectation itself which is at fault.

In order to understand why consensus broke down in this community group, we began to look at the conflicts underlying moments of apparent consensus, focusing on the strategies, goals, and awareness held by the individuals moving towards consensus. It became clear that individuals in the group were bringing to these moments of conversational consensus radically different interpretations of the common topic. Instead of seeing consensus as a moment of simple agreement, we began to see these points of apparent consensus as sites of negotiation among conflicting representations.

The following analysis, focused on a moment of apparent consensus, attempts to identify the conflicts embedded in the two issues under discussion--the *purpose* of the document and the *process* (involving landlords and tenants) it was going to support. Conflicting goals, we saw, did not always surface immediately. Individuals do not explain their own goals to the group, and group members typically do not seem to infer that their goals may not be shared. Group members do appear willing to come to consensus--in fact, they act as if they *have* reached consensus. The attitude of the group is congenial, the tone is relaxed, and all four of the participants are actively engaged in negotiating the purpose of the document. But instead of hearing only consensus, it is possible to hear both consensus (about the concept of "process") and dissensus (about what form that process ought to take, how it ought to be defined, and its features):

> Liz: --let's say the purpose of the document would be to, develop a process by which we can--
> LuWanda: Get a better understanding between the landlord and the tenant.
> Liz: --of the expectations--
> Dave: Of each.
> Liz: --let's get that word in. The expectations--
> Lorraine: Do what with the expectations?
> Dave: Before, during, and after the tenancy.
> Liz: Yes.
> LuWanda: [inaudible 300]
> Dave: Cool.
> Liz: And the relationship.
> Kirk: The process of clarifying--
> Liz: Let's get this in [inaudible over others talking 302]
> LuWanda: The ongoing relationship, not just the entrance relationship. Ongoing throughout the term of the lease.
> Dave: And after the exit. (1.45)

If we were to analyze this linguistically we might see this as an "exchange," composed of an "initiation and any contributions" where later utterances show "compliance" to the minitopic being addressed (Stubbs, p. 135). As such, it might be seen as "an accumulation of shared meaning (Stubbs, p. 116)" where the accumulation occurs around the idea of process.

Other evidence supports this image of a developing consensus. The consensus can be seen, for example, to extend beyond defining the relationship that ought to exist between landlords and tenants and to also establish the purpose of the document. In this agreement on process and purpose, we see a comfortable informality, a responsiveness, a desire to be part of the dialogue. The group members listen to and affirm one another: Dave listens to the others and responds with "Cool"; Liz listens to Dave and

responds, "Yes." Later adding "[L]et's get that word in" and "Let's get this is," Liz stands in for the group implying "we should." Through this collective speech act (Stubbs, p. 160), Liz not only establishes her own goals ("let's say the purpose is") but also draws the group into her own objectives.

The highly cohesive nature of this passage further suggests that a shared representation exists. Repetition ("ongoing"), additiveness ("and"), negation used as a tool to set apart ideas ("not just the entrance relationship"), and shared terminology (for example, the repetition of the words "expectations", "relationship", and "process" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) all support this cohesion: not only are the words friendly, but the tone is as well. The group wants to share meaning: they finish one another's sentences and build on the ideas of others. In doing this, every voice is heard (and to some extent accommodated) within the discussion. The idea of what the process ought to be is still being shaped (listen to it move from "understanding" to "expectations" to "relationships" and "clarification"), but nevertheless the tone of this session is confident; the group members are excited about the level of consensus they have managed to achieve. This must be the kind of moment that community workers look forward to most. In this moment, the group members seem confident that their ideas are being affirmed, and that this is a signal of the group's essential agreement.

In spite of these signs of a shared consensus, however, this passage can also be read as evidence that group members hold wildly different goals and representations. If, instead of a conversational analysis, we conduct a strategic analysis that tries to construct purposes and ideas underneath conversation and behind the notion of process, then the signs indicate a lack of agreement. After analyzing the process in which they are engaged, it seems easy to predict that the consensus reached in this moment will inevitably breakdown, as, in fact, it does. Let's turn to the sessions to hear how these different goals and representations are embedded in the group's discussions.

In retrospect, Liz's and Kirk's representations of the purpose of the document (whether to establish a process or to inform community members about already existing processes) seem to be at odds. While we cannot demonstrate that the group members are aware of their own divergent interests (they rarely, if ever, comment on their disagreements in the sessions), it is clear that Liz, with her interest in mediation, thinks the group ought to develop an explicit process that can be used to teach landlords and tenants what their responsibilities are and hopes a renter's checklist will be "incorporated into the process" (3.14).[6] Kirk, however, believes "[a renter's

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[6] Here the first number ("3") indicates the quote comes from the third session, and the second number ("14") indicates that it comes from the 14th page of the transcripts from the third session. We use this convention throughout the rest of this document.

checklist] actually should be part of a lease" (3.14). Likewise Kirk, in his desire to have landlords and tenants accept a process, seems aware of social and historical constraints working against such a process (and thus wants to establish a rationale for convincing landlords and tenants) (3.23), while Liz seems confident that landlords and tenants will implicitly accept that a process is necessary. By the last group session, Kirk argues that "really the purpose of the document was only to investigate...a process or what could be done" (4.25), but Liz has a different view--she argues that the group has agreed to offer a process. Their conflict culminates when Kirk insists, "We're not offering a process" (4.36). If we return to the sessions to reconstruct the purposes and ideas behind the notion of process, we can see why this consensus was more apparent than real and how the terminology that the group chose to use to discuss their plan may have contributed to this misleading consensus.

As early as the first session, and continuing throughout the sessions, these discussions offer evidence of the separately held representations and show why we might expect consensus to break down. Figure 1 summarizes the representations held by the four participants during the first session as they discussed the process they hoped to establish, defined the group's goals, and named their purpose. In this session, Liz and Kirk begin by discussing the idea of a process. Already their views suggest a future conflict: Liz sees the process as a well-defined, legal document; Kirk, however, wants to incorporate both legal and social roles (including a discussion of how relationships define responsibilities). In spite of these separately held representations, these differences are not confronted and group members proceed to define their goals. In the process of defining goals, differences between LuWanda and Dave also appear. LuWanda, who stresses the need to improve communication between landlords and tenants, contrasts with Dave, who wants to educate the entire community. Again, LuWanda's and Dave's divergent opinions are not openly acknowledged as differences and so resurface when the group names the purpose of their document. For Liz, the goal is to establish expectations; for LuWanda, the goal is to build a relationship. For Kirk, the goal is to clarify responsibilities; for Dave, to create a relationship that involves all of the members of the community with one another. Over the course of the remaining sessions, there is no indication that these four representations shift. By interpreting these representations in light of the personal history and the group's shared history, we may begin to understand why the assumed consensus is misleading.

EPISODE	*Liz*	*LuWanda*	*Kirk*	*Dave*
Discuss	is a legal process		is a global process	
Define goals	find remedy	improve communi-cations		educate community
*****	**moment of**	**apparent**	**consensus**	*****
Name purpose	establish landlord and tenant expectations	create understandin g and ongoing relationships	clarify responsibili-ties	create ongoing relationships

Fig. 1 Tracing a Moment of Apparent Consensus

Liz urges a legal interpretation of process. As a mediator between landlords and tenants, she understands existing processes--the law, the lease, the kinds of decisions judges are likely to make, the kinds of evidence likely to hold up in court. "If there was a process, and we could make it well known," she argues, "even if the landlord didn't participate, he would still know that that process was in place. And that ultimately somewhere down the line, he if, even if he didn't use the process, he would know that he would be taken to task by the process" (3.23). But her concerns are not exclusively with tenants. Because she is so aware of the minefield that landlords and tenants negotiate, she wants "a process that changes the perceptions" of both landlords and tenants (1.24). The process she describes is closely tied to law and based on existing structures. Furthermore, the kind of process she describes can be written down and encoded: landlords need a process for screening tenants (2.24) and for deciding when to evict (1.3); tenants need a process for renting housing (3.14).

Unlike Liz, whose position is clearly articulated and detailed, LuWanda's idea of process is vague. Although she is a tenant and, as a representative for tenants rights, a vocal representative of the community with experiences to support her own ideas, LuWanda's position often does not get heard. We might suspect that this is so because the others ignore her, but instead it appears that, particularly in the early sessions, she does not speak as frequently as the others (a secondary reason for this may also be that she is late to the first meeting and misses the second one entirely). Perhaps her lack of talk is not surprising--of the two groups being represented, she represents tenants, a group that has historically and socially been thought to have little power. When she does talk, LuWanda calls for "communication" (1.35), wants to develop "the ongoing relationship" between landlords and tenants (1.45), and calls for regular meetings between landlords and tenants,

where individuals can sit down and talk out problems. While this view of simple contact succeeding in solving problems seems underarticulated and unrealistic, it is a position to which she strongly clings.

Kirk wants a process to articulate responsibilities and to guide community members to responsible action. Unlike Liz, who wants a process that states the rules landlords and tenants must follow, and unlike LuWanda, who wants a process to establish informal communication, Kirk wants a global process to describe how people ought to treat one another. Perhaps because he is skeptical about what any process by itself can achieve, he doesn't see Liz's prescription for more awareness of laws as being useful. Instead he recognizes that "the landlord and tenant would have to buy into that process" and knows that just having a law will not create the sense of buy-in (3.23). Kirk also recognizes that an adversarial relationship already exists between landlords and tenants (1.31) and that this adversarial relationship cannot be overcome simply by notifying individuals of their legal responsibilities. He recognizes flaws in the current system too (3.27), unlike Liz who believes that the current system works just fine. All of this, and his own experiences as a landlord, lead him to want to clarify the responsibilities of both landlords and tenants (1.45). This difference in vision comes to a head during the last session (4.25) when Liz and Kirk seem to recognize that they are speaking from very different positions.

So far we have noticed differences in direction (Should the relationship between landlords and tenants be social, communitarian, or legal?) and in depth (To what extent?). Dave, as the full-time, paid president of a community group, has concerns for the landlord, the tenant, and the community around them, and so bring in education but does not advocate for a single position. For Dave, "I think it's gotta be an educational thing" (1.35). He knows that landlords and tenants "tend to develop one viewpoint and fight it to the bitter end" (Self-Interview, Oct. 24 1991, p. 1), but sees intervention strategies such as roleplaying in getting people to see all sides. His primary concern is with organizations, and particularly with "teach[ing] organizations how to intervene in these squabbles that generally arise" (Self-Interview, Oct. 24 1991, p. 1). And if landlords and tenants "are educated the same going into the, the agreement--they're both on even ground--or the ground is more even" (1.35). Because of his concern for the entire community, Dave seems to subsume the views of others (like LuWanda, Dave is concerned about communication; like Kirk, he is also concerned about responsibility) to create his own position.

When group members hold disparate representations of a complex problem (based, as we have seen, on multiple factors such as values, experiences, and responsibilities), how can groups achieve agreement? What appears to happen is that individuals may 1) agree only on terminology, and recognize or fail to recognize that they hold different representations, 2)

partially share a particular representation (and recognize, or fail to recognize, that this representation is not shared in its entirety), or 3) believe that their representations are shared in whole. (It is unlikely in our view that representations themselves will actually be shared.) If group members walk away from a community discussion believing that their own representation is shared by others in the group, and if it later turns out that this is not the case, it is understandable that group members may end up feeling betrayed, or feeling that community groups do nothing but "talk." It may be then that group members need to see consensus not as a shared understanding of the present situation and desired outcome, but as an agreement to come to action, in spite of the fact that individual representations of the actual problem may not be shared.

Having consensus appear and (because of competing representations) later break down is, we think, a common but critical problem in community groups. This breakdown of consensus leads us to several fundamental questions: What do we mean when we talk about consensus? And what do the members of this community group mean?

Consensus in Action

Although community members may hold disparate representations, they must still work collectively to accommodate differences. In order to meet their goals, members of this group opted to establish consensus about desirable actions rather than about ideas. In this sense, consensus came about in the process of acting--in producing a written text.

Developing and including new text conventions offered group members one way to accommodate differences. Where the written text typically produced by a community group might state generic problems and solutions, in this study, individuals narrated particular problems that they had encountered or heard about--stories that were typical of the problems found in their community. These narratives, which they called "scenarios", brought to light a variety of problems with landlord-tenant interactions. As a text feature, scenarios structured the final document by providing a place for the group members to present the kinds of problems they saw as typical of their neighborhood. Having raised problems with the scenarios, the group invented another text convention--called "what ifs"--that provided a place in the text to suggest possible solutions. "What ifs" are questions that are physically appended to scenarios and which expand the possible ways of resolving the problem that has been identified. These "what ifs" raised questions about what could have been done and suggested alternatives for handling the situation. Both the scenarios and the what ifs provided a structure for the final text, but they went beyond merely structuring the text because they also served social and personal functions.

Scenarios allow individuals to feel personally engaged and to bring concrete experiences to the negotiation. By telling stories and sharing information about themselves and their experiences, they also allow the group members to share their values, beliefs, and concerns about the community and its problems. This, in turn, allows individuals to have their perceptions reinforced by the group. When Dave describes a problem he faces ("we have tenants in [our neighborhood] that know how to use the system, how to stay in their apartment for 6 months [without paying rent]" (1.36)), it allows Kirk to describe a similar experience ("the tenant would come to me and say, [my employer] got screwed up... [and so I can't pay my rent] and the next month [the date that I receive my rental payment] will be later" (1.39)). While these stories may be seen as grounding the discussion, they also ground the individual, by helping the others see that personal experiences shape the speaker's understanding of the community and its problems. Furthermore, by sharing their experiences, the group can begin to create a shared understanding of the community in which they live.

Scenarios bear the stamp of the individual writer's goals. Dave's goal, for example, of having landlords and tenants recognize that their actions will also affect the community, is played out in his scenario. When neither the landlord nor the tenant meets the other's expectations, his scenario reveals, the entire community suffers. As the president of a community group we can expect that his concern is with long-term community issues, and this is reflected in his scenario. Likewise, Liz's concerns as a mediator are reflected in her scenario, which addresses how people *ought* to act in particular situations. Similarly, LuWanda's concern for communication and Kirk's concern for responsibility are revealed in their respective scenarios.

Scenarios serve social goals too by making it possible for group members to share particular experiences and to think through ways each of them might approach the problem. In doing this, the knowledge, beliefs, and values of each individual are applied to a shared problem. Group members can, in this process, hear other perspectives and come to understand other members of their community. Additionally, group members may have their own ideas validated by others in the group. Relationships within the group are built and strengthened in the process of sharing problems and working together to find solutions.

Dissensus is acknowledged and invited out into the open with scenarios. After Dave reads his own scenario, for example, Kirk wonders aloud when the landlord ought to have evicted the tenant who has stopped paying rent. In the ensuing discussion, it is clear that the members of the group have very different opinions. But asking the question allows the group to consider a number of possibilities and to reflect on its own practices--the same sort of active reflection that they hope to create in their readers. Thus,

scenarios, in fact, not only acknowledge dissensus but also allow dissensus to surface for the purpose of inquiry.

And scenarios are able to accommodate that dissensus in the final text. Scenarios let group members reflect on the conflicts and potential conflicts they are describing; rather than trying to resolve and come to consensus about these points of disagreement, using this convention lets them incorporate their own lack of agreement into the document. While they see scenarios as an effective strategy for reflecting the differences that exist between landlords and tenants, the notion of scenarios really emerged as a way to respond to the dissensus that existed. They had given themselves the goal of describing the relationship that ought to exist between landlords and tenants, but they were still divided over what kind of relationship ought to exist, and in particular over whether their job as representatives of the community was to *prescribe a code of behavior* or to *set options for behavior*. As described above, Liz advocated setting standards; Kirk wanted to help members of the community think through their options. The scenario and what-if conventions let them accommodate these apparently mutually exclusive goals. Rather than glossing over the disagreements that actually existed within their group, they ultimately decided to construct a text that not only reflected, but even capitalized on, those differences.

In addition to accommodating difference, this text convention evolved through a process of negotiation. Tracking this evolution reveals how members constructed a strategy for dealing with differences. Over the course of the sessions, the participants negotiated what the word "scenario" meant. Liz, like a negotiator working with particular instances, wants to know if as part of their discussion they will be given a scenario to try to resolve (1.5); here she seems to be expecting a particular, existing conflict. But for this group scenarios are not always about situations that have already occurred. For Kirk, scenarios seem to represent a way to open up general problems and to see them from a number of different perspectives. He talks about "scenario building" (1.27), recognizes that "there are other scenarios" (1.26), and wants the group to "finish out that scenario" (1.27). For a time, it seems doubtful that scenarios will really be of much use to the group because of this tension about what scenarios ought to do. But gradually the idea is modified.

The features change over time in order to accommodate differences. At first, scenarios appear as models and examples for how individuals ought to behave. But later, Dave introduces the text convention of "what ifs" as a way to think through a problem: "If we do a scenario thing, we could say, now 'what if' you did this, and 'what if' you did that?" (2.28)--a move that also seems to accommodate Kirk's desire to provide options. Scenarios are also seen as establishing certain "parameters" for acceptable action. As Kirk suggests, "the parameters of this scenario are sort of clear: you've got a bad tenant" (Kirk, 2.41). And this feature of scenarios seems to some extent to

meet Liz's needs. The advantage of the scenario is that it can evolve to accommodate the goals of all of these writers. This cumulative development of the concept of scenarios makes them a flexible tool in resolving the group's tension about what they ought to do. We are not claiming that scenarios in and of themselves are the necessary solution; in fact, we would guess that any number of textual features could have served a similar function. Instead, what seems essential here is that the group members knew how to use text to represent strongly felt personal problems while at the same time moving the group toward social action.

But what determines what is actually included in these scenarios and in the final, completed text? We have already argued that individuals come to the discussions with strong ideas about the problems facing their community and how to solve them. We have also argued that often differences between individuals are not resolved in the process of coming to consensus. Yet it seems clear that there must be some way to reconcile these differences (after all, a final text does exist and the members of this group have come to some sense of resolution in agreeing on its contents). If it is not consensus alone that allows these individuals to produce the final text, then what is it? We might assume that strong social norms (expertise, experience, and education, for example) are at work, deciding what voices are heard. For example, we might expect that the landlords (Dave and Kirk), as owners of property, might be given more attention. Or we might expect that leaders in the community (Liz as a mediator, Dave as a president of a community group) would have more prestige and would claim more authority. Or we might expect that the men (Kirk and Dave) would be given (or would take) more time to talk than the women (LuWanda and Liz). And we would probably also expect experience and education and a number of other factors to play some role in how these different individuals would get their messages across. For instance, all of these points might lead us to believe that as the discussion continued, LuWanda's voice would be heard less and less, and that her ideas would be unlikely candidates for inclusion in the final text. But is this what actually happens?

When we count conversational turns, a pattern of interaction emerges that seems to hold true for at least some of our expectations. LuWanda, as expected, has the fewest number of conversational turns. Liz, the experienced mediator, has the most (with over three times more than LuWanda). Dave and Kirk are roughly equivalent to one another, with more than 850 conversational turns each (almost twice as many as LuWanda's 480).

Liz	1487
Dave	893
Kirk	868
LuWanda	480

But such a chart, which merely reflects totals, doesn't adequately describe the interactions occurring within particular sessions. In order to do this, we need to examine what these numbers represent.

A figure that maps out differences in each of the sessions reveals a slightly different pattern. It reveals, not surprisingly, that everyone tended to talk more during later sessions than during earlier ones. It also shows Liz, the mediator, consistently talking more than anyone else. What does seem surprising, however, is that LuWanda, who talks least frequently during the first three sessions and who walks into the group with the least "power" (in the sense that we have defined above), was at least as involved as either Kirk or Dave during the final session.

	1st Session	2nd Session	3rd Session	4th Session
Liz	288	335	316	548
Dave	124	307	174	288
Kirk	134	230	222	282
LuWanda	95	--	91	294

LuWanda, because she seems to break from our expectations, offers an interesting place to begin an investigation. As she describes her motivation for participating, she says, "What I wanna accomplish in this meeting is to be, to be heard" (Self Interview 1, p.2). More pragmatically, "I wanna know how to go about discussing, getting these things done, coming to some sort of agreement to get this situation resolved [describing a problem she is having with her own landlord], or will it ever be?" (Self-Interview, Nov. 1, p.7-8). LuWanda, who clearly seems motivated to participate, does not seem to know how to reach her goals, yet she is successful in ensuring that the final text does include a discussion of "communication and responsibilities." Given LuWanda's sense of her limited authority, how is she able to have her voice heard in the discussion and to have her ideas included in the final text? (It is important to note here that we are not claiming that the other members of the group found her position gained acceptance simply because she talked more, nor do we assume that the act of talking about a position grants it greater validity or authority with a group. Still, if our initial hypotheses are accurate concerning LuWanda's lack of overt involvement early on (which we see as being linked to her own sense of authority, rather than her personality), then it seems likely that either something about the group changed, or LuWanda herself did something differently to position herself to be involved in the discussion.) What did she do to enable her "voice" (in the double sense of physical voice and her ideological voice) to be heard?

As we saw in the analysis of misleading consensus, these writers do not concur on how to represent this problem. By personal experience and by

design they bring alternative perspectives and different even competing interests to the table. They are committed to positions that reflect personal histories and the people they represent. Moreover, the design of Argue validated diversity--the positions of landlord and tenant, the professional, personal, and community perspectives, and cultural differences of black and white.

So what does it mean to say they achieved consensus? This argument process does not fit the model of debate in which a contest between preestablished claims is resolved on the basis of logic or in which through persuasive appeals to evidence or emotion one set of propositions emerges the victor. This is not a democratic consensus in which consensus forms around the magnet of a majority will. Nor is this like the consensus achieved in the negotiation of a dispute or contract in which participants come with fixed goals, but willing to barter minor outcomes to achieve major ones, although there are important parallels. For instance, one of the key strategies developed in the Harvard Negotiation Project is apparent here as participants try to shift the ground of negotiation away from [particular outcomes to larger values and grounds of agreement. check]

In contrast to the models of debate, democracy, or arbitration, the consensus we see here is achieved not around a set of winning claims, a dominant perspective, or a distribution of benefits but through a joint literate action. The group may not agree on the problem or even on the best, wisest, most effective, ethical response, but they were able construct a shared action they could take in text.

Looking at this event as a collaborative literate action in which people are *constructing* a meaning helps explain how conflict became at times a generative force, rather that a mere contest of entrenched positions. First, the design of the collaborative planning process gave people new roles (beyond that of spokespersons) as collaborative partners dedicated to the construction of something concrete--a text that would help their community deal with a problem. People were positioned from the beginning not only as problem-solvers but as writers and collaborators, whose job included quite literally helping the "opposition" articulate their vision.

Secondly, this literate action became a site for consensus because it allowed a multi-vocal representation of the problem. The negotiation theory which we are bringing to this analysis argued that when writers are pushed to the negotiation of conflict they must attend to a circle of voices that advise, suggest, cajole, trouble, persuade and generally attempt to shape meaning in their own image. Literate action, here in the forms of scenarios and what ifs, offered a way to incorporate a variety of voices, not as opposing claims but as conditionalized ways of responding to a complex situation. In short they tried to construct a meaning that supported action in the face of diverse facets of

this problem. Negotiation operates in two common senses of the term. One is negotiation as arbitration among competing voices for power--which voice will dominate the meaning etc. The other is negotiation as navigation--a move to embrace multiple possibilities [use examples]

Finally, this literate construction supported consensus because it was happy to cross boundaries and violate the expectations of conventional texts. The final document, like other texts emerging from the CLC, was a hybrid text. On one level, it was a published document, focused on four critical problems, motivated by policy issues of how to interpret the complex causes of landlord and tenant conflicts. But at the same time, it was designed to speak to these problems, not in the conventional language of policy or analysis, but out of the experience of everyday people in the community, telling stories. Yet, unlike the landlords' "horror stories"--one-sided accounts of commiseration--the scenarios and what-ifs are grassroots policy statements, designed to reflect the competing perspectives that underlie the conflict. And as a grassroots approach to policy, the document did not present itself as a traditional policy statement in which analysis was shrinkwrapped into a set of more abstract recommendations. Instead, the group decided to design the document as the basis for a community discussion they held that spring, using the scenarios as a way to invite other organizations into the construction of a larger discussion and text.

Landlords and Tenants is an example of a mixed genre, an eclectic, ad hoc text design invented to serve a rhetorical purpose. However, as a hybrid text it negotiates a even more important set of conflicts when it crosses the boundaries of powerful, socially significant discourses--discourses that rarely occupy the same space. As the draft evolves, the legal, procedural language of certainty, rubs shoulders with story telling, and warm, African American statements of conviction and adjuration. This is not to say this negotiation is without difficulty. In fact, some instances of the grammar of Black English Vernacular seemed "incorrect" or improper to some of the group [go into be grammar? --and what did happen to that final section,, ask Lorraine?. I'm not sure how strong this point is now, since the final version is more homogeneous than the last draft I interviewed on.]

Hybrid discourses like these are an important alternative to single voiced documents not only because they invite different perspectives, but because they allow a larger community to hear themselves speaking in the document in the language they use, in a discourse that empowers rather than marginalizes them. Such documents allow more people to feel they too can stand in the discussion--they are being spoken to and invited to speak back.

Conflict and Transformation

Consensus in action and hybrid texts let writers negotiate conflict by not only recognizing difference, but embracing it. They navigate among conflict and constraint looking for the best path, trying to construct a meaning that listens to multiple voices and preserves as many values as possible. However, at times negotiation in the group dealt with conflict head on, when differences were put on the table as explicit disagreements. In these circumstances, it would be reasonable to expect the sort of win/lose scenarios both Kirk and Dan described, contests in which social norms and prestige discourse dominate the construction of meaning. In the face of such expectations, the process of knowledge transformation we did observe becomes doubly interesting.

Clearly other strategies (beyond social norms) are being invoked.[7] What are these strategies? And how are they used? Here we will focus on LuWanda, who employs a number of strategies to bring her views into wider circulation, but we will also show that the others also used strategies to reshape their ideas in order to make them more appealing to members of the group. Strategies for transforming ideas include linking new ideas with accepted ideas, repetition, and adapting terminology. Here we define and discuss briefly the rationale these individuals may have used in opting for their use.

One way of transforming ideas is by linking weaker ideas with stronger ones. While the group's purpose is initially framed as an investigation into the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants, the group has already been thinking along these lines. In fact, Kirk's interest in rights and responsibilities began long before this group discussion: "I have been a landlord for many, many years and am constantly trying to figure out them, this rights and responsibilities idea" (1.7). And this linking of rights and responsibilities seems acceptable to each of them: Liz agrees when she insists that "you can't speak of, of rights alone, you have to add rights and responsibilities" (1.8). LuWanda also accepts the linking of rights and responsibilities, although she sees problems resulting from people's inability to communicate with one another. Early on she positions herself: "I can

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[7] Although we describe this as a strategic process, when participants were asked about their own strategies, we received a variety of responses. Kevin, for example, was entirely aware of his tendency to play the devil's advocate and how his vocabulary choices were predicated on how he wanted his ideas to be received. Lavonne, on the other hand, did not talk about her strategies. When questioned about whether she did in fact have strategies, Lavonne did not show evidence that she did. Nonetheless, Lavonne was using strategies. We would argue, therefore, that people are not necessarily aware of how they carry on the process of transformation, but that transformation occurs in any case.

understand both sides and I have arguments on either side, so my main purpose is to see if there can be communication between the landlords and the tenants maybe once a month, that they could talk about the issues that need to be addressed" (1.11). LuWanda, whether knowingly or not, uses an idea that has already gained acceptance within the group ("rights and responsibilities") to launch her primary concern: communication. In her mind, balancing rights and responsibilities is not possible without communication. And this link begins to hold for other members of the group.

Even after the group seems willing to accept communication as one of the major concerns of the group (Liz agrees as early as the first session (1.21) that communication should be one of their key points), LuWanda returns again and again to the idea. During the first session, she introduces and reinforces, repeating it six times (considerable when we take into account that she has a total of 95 turns). (Since LuWanda isn't there during the second session, it's important that she's already gotten her main point in during the first session.) While she continues to reinforce her idea during later sessions, it is this first session that sets her position and introduces others to it. Repetition, then, is another strategy that LuWanda uses to reinforce her ideas.

Rather than simply advancing the idea of communication, however, LuWanda starts talking about "communication and responsibilities." Her use of the phrase seems strategic too, in that communication precedes responsibilities and replaces "rights." Although there is little sense that she is aware of her own strategies, this is the final phase in making her ideas acceptable: first, she links her own ideas to those that have already been accepted. Next, she repeats her ideas to reinforce the group's acceptance. Finally, she transposes her term ("communication") so that it replaces another ("rights") but also precedes "responsibilities." In this process, the discussion of "rights" drops out and the group continues discussing communication and responsibilities. The other group members may not initially intend for this to happen. Dan sees communication as "one of the responsibilities...I mean, it's probably one of the key responsibilities" (11) but he clearly sees it as being subordinate to "responsibilities" alone. Nevertheless, the linking of communication and responsibilities seems to stick, with Dave arguing that "the purpose is communication and responsibility" (2.54) and Kirk supporting with "And basically it seems that most of these conflicts are lessened with good communication and people taking responsibility" (2.55). Liz, when asked about the key point to be made in the document, responds with "how it can create a better working relationship between the tenant and the landlord you know, by communicating and, and by communicating the responsibilities of each individual a better relationship can be created" (2.55). Her stress is on the responsibilities more than on communication, but she seems willing to use the ideas that others have advanced in order to ensure that the main point is

stressed. (Liz seems primarily concerned about how these ideas will be received by the audience--when Lorraine asks her why they should discuss both communication and responsibility, she argues "that's a good idea because that's really a positive way of doing it" (2.57). This is formalized when Dave argues "it is our intention to discuss communication and responsibility between tenants and landlords" (2.61) and Liz states, "I think we all agree that communication and responsibility are two key elements in resolving or dealing with tenant landlord conflicts" (2.62). Listen to Liz try to formalize the group's agreement: "We are, as individuals, going to take a specific conflict and try to get a clear outline or...the cause and effect of the conflict and a positive outcome. Dealing with communication and responsibility" (2.66). By linking communications with responsibilities, LuWanda begins a strategic process that ensures "responsibilities" (and not just "rights") are taken into account.

While the terminology being used seems important to how quickly the ideas will be accepted, the individuals seem more concerned about finding ways to form relationships between ideas that have already been accepted by the group and the particular ideas they are interested in. The whole group, for instance, is interested in "responsibility." When individuals talk about responsibility, they know they will find an audience. What seems less important to them is that their ideas about what constitutes responsibility are divergent. When Kirk talks about responsibility, for example, the implication is "social responsibility" (1.41), particularly when he describes "people [who] try to relinquish more and more responsibility for what happens in their lives" (2.3) and argues that "the best we can do is outline responsibility" (2.31). In contrast, when LuWanda talks about responsibility, she is really referring to the responsibility to communicate. And Liz's sense of responsibility is the ability and willingness to engage in a legally-defined relationship. Yet in spite of their different conceptions of what responsibility means, they all rely on the same terminology to present their ideas to the group. During the course of their discussions these differences emerge, yet each continues to use "responsibility" to define the concepts each is most concerned about.

Furthermore, neither strategies for transformation nor individual positions seem to change as the result of having other members of the group discount certain ideas. Instead, what seems to occur is that individuals whose ideas are not accepted by the group (particularly when those ideas are strongly felt) continue to bring their own ideas up as reasonable alternatives to the ideas that are offered by other members of the group. Liz, for example, is unable to get the others to embrace her interest in legal responsibilities, but this does not stop her from continued discussion. During her self-interview (Self-Interview, Nov. 5, p.1), she shows her own awareness of this phenomenon: "I really do have my own agenda when it comes to this memorandum of understanding and I'm sure that it differs very much from those of people that I have been sharing this group with." For Liz,

responsibilities are more important than communication (3.17) because the legal relationships define what kinds of communication are possible. LuWanda takes a similar approach. For her, the stress is on "communication"--in fact, her scenario reflects only her concern for communication, in spite of her agreement that the group's focus is on "communication and responsibilities" (4.26). LuWanda argues: "You can't find out about your responsibilities unless you communicate. That's how, that's the basis around responsibilities, is communicating to find out what you do agree on and what you're gonna do, you have to talk, you have to" (4.72). When Lorraine asks about the key point of the scenarios, and prompts with "the key to resolving these problems is..." Kirk and LuWanda both reply "communication" (4.70), but Liz responds, "Communication and responsibilities." Later she urges, "I think we need to talk a little bit more about responsibilities" (4.72). Both Liz and LuWanda claim they are willing to accept the group's decision to focus on communication and responsibilities, but each continues to act in her own interests.

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, members of this group used a variety of strategies in order to transform how their ideas were received by other members of the group. These rhetorical strategies seem to have been successful in ensuring that voices are heard, sometimes at the cost of sustaining the conflict that community members are trying to minimize. In community groups, the desire for the group to be in a state of consensus often runs up against the desire of the individual to have his or her voice included in the final text. As a result, conflicts are not brought to the surface (to discuss them directly would be to rend the fabric of consensus) and are left to emerge again and again. For this group, reaching consensus means reaching a point where conflicts are hidden (but certainly not gone) in order to create a solid foundation for moving to action.

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